



Office of Management's Monthly Newsletter

The Beacon

U.S. Department of Agriculture
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Ronald Hicks, Deputy Administrator

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bea-con (bê' ken) *noun*

A signaling or guiding device, such as a lighthouse, located on a coast. A source of guidance or

RON'S CORNER

How is ASD Doing in Meeting Your Needs?

by Ron Hicks
Deputy Administrator
Office of Management
Telephone: 202-720-4425

As part of its commitment to excellence, ASD has contracted with the Center for Organizational Excellence (COE), of Rockville, MD, to conduct an organizational assessment of its operations. This assessment will highlight strengths and weaknesses and provide a basis for future improvement initiatives.

A key part of this assessment involves getting feedback from the full range of ASD's customers, wherever they may be. To simplify this process, COE has designed an online customer survey form. This is a voluntary survey, but will be very helpful to the assessment. If you would like to make your opinions heard, please go to the following website and complete the quick online survey:

https://www.flashbase.com/forms/ASD_Customers

Please note the following:

1. The address begins with "https" instead of the usual "http"
2. There is an underscore between ASD_Customers

If you do not have internet access, please call Shaina Fisher in ASD on 301-504-3991 to obtain a copy.

All information is maintained confidentially and results are presented to ASD management in summary form only. Comments are encouraged where indicated as these often provide the best insights into opportunities for improvement.

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Please complete the survey as soon as possible. If you have any questions or concerns, please call Craig Anderson at COE, Tel: 301-948-1922, ext. 306, or via e-mail canderson@center4oe.com

WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

Consumer Safety Officer: Bringing a More Scientific, Systems-Based Approach to Inspection

by Mark Mina
Deputy Administrator
Office of Field Operations
Telephone: 202-720-5190

What is the current status?

As reported in the December issue of *The Beacon*, in its FY2000 appropriation bill, Congress expressed concern about the funding increase required to convert and relocate employees into Consumer Safety Officer (CSO) positions, among other issues.

Congress asked FSIS to submit a report outlining a more cost-effective implementation plan. FSIS decided to cancel the 30 CSO positions that were advertised in six geographic locations last summer and to suspend further recruitment pending Congressional response to the report. The report, which is being drafted, will reflect a revised implementation plan whereby CSO positions are announced within local commuting areas, wherever possible, to reduce relocation costs. The report will also include information FSIS believes will provide Congress with more background on the Agency's immediate and long-term vision for an even more effective food safety program with consumer safety officers in its workforce.

The purpose of this article is to explain the "why" behind the agency's plan for introducing the CSO series. There will be subsequent articles covering the

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agency's plans on the introduction and use of CSO's. Articles will address such issues as work methods, qualifications, training, selection and hiring process, just to name a few.

Why CSO?

The stimulus for the introduction and use of CSO's within FSIS is the 1996 passage of the Pathogen Reduction; Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) Systems Final Rule. The rule significantly changed the Agency's regulatory philosophy by reinforcing the accountability on the industry for producing safe, wholesome, and unadulterated meat and poultry products. It requires the industry to design and maintain systems that focus on preventing food safety hazards reasonably likely to occur in order to reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

Because of the increasing complexity and breadth of inspection work, a major goal of the Agency has been the introduction of a new professional-level series. And it is a goal that is critical to enabling FSIS to make further progress in improving food safety. The industry is constantly changing and expanding. New technologies and production methods are surpassing the traditional mode of inspection. Concerns related to emerging pathogens are forcing us to constantly re-evaluate our inspection approach. These factors increase the complexity and breadth of inspection work.

As a regulatory agency, we cannot merely keep pace—we must forge ahead. We have made much progress with the implementation of the Pathogen Reduction and HACCP rule—the centerpiece of the agency's food safety strategy. Meeting this goal requires a diverse workforce with a variety of scientific disciplines. It requires a workforce with necessary scientific and

analytical background like that provided by CSO's.

CSO's will provide the Agency more flexibility in assigning professionals in areas where there is a greater demand for scientific knowledge and judgment. The CSO will work directly on the front lines, in industry operations, to determine the adequacy of process control systems to prevent and reduce foodborne hazards. Also, CSO's will perform other verification procedures to determine industry's compliance with other consumer protection regulatory requirements, such as, economic and wholesomeness issues.

The value of having CSO's rests with what they bring to the Agency in terms of their scientific education and its application in the regulatory oversight of meat and poultry plants.

Where will the Positions Be Located?

The Agency believes that GS-11 full-performance CSO positions can be established and filled at most of the locations currently staffed by GS-9 through GS-11 inspectors in processing operations. The Agency has established a selective placement factor that applicants must meet to fully qualify for CSO positions. This factor is experience in assessing food safety or other consumer protection systems by independently developing and applying a plan to evaluate the scientific adequacy of a manufacturer's plans and processes for producing safe products. Applicants must compete for these positions if either: (1) the full-performance level of GS-11 is above their current or former grade OR (2) they do not meet the selective placement factor and must enter a training program to fully qualify. The Agency has established a training program so that selected employees can receive the training to fully qualify for the

CSO position. Therefore, all current employees, GS-8 through GS-11 employees will have to be competitively selected for placement in CSO positions.

The Agency has a significant number of positions filled by Consumer Safety Inspectors in the 1862 series. Several hundred of these employees currently meet the educational requirements for the 696 series. Those employees who do not meet the educational requirements may want to do so by completing the necessary college level course work. Further, the Agency wants to help employees by creating an educational financial assistance program. The specifics on this will be contained in a management proposal to the National Joint Council. When the negotiation process is completed, it will be shared with all FSIS employees.

As presented in our report to Congress, the Agency would like to establish and fill approximately 50 CSO positions by the end of this fiscal year. We will keep employees informed on this opportunity through regular articles in *The Beacon*.

As stated at the start of this article, we will be covering other relevant subjects and issues on the introduction and use of the CSO series in subsequent articles. The Agency recognizes the impact this change will have on employees, particularly on those assigned to processing positions. It's for this reason that the Agency is committed to some type of transitional program to allow employees to gain the necessary qualifications. However, they will have to compete.

Performance or Not?

One last word on the subject. The fact that the Agency is moving to the 696 series is not a reflection of or a judgement on the quality of work performed by the thousands of

employees who have served as Food Inspectors over the years and more recently as Consumer Safety Inspectors. *This isn't a performance issue.* Instead, the CSO introduction is a result of a change in the way work is to be accomplished in the HACCP-based inspection work environment. *The Agency management is not only appreciative, but also proud of the past and continuing contribution of employees serving as Food Inspectors and Consumer Safety Inspectors.* We hope that all employees will commit to meeting these new challenges and will want to prepare themselves, if necessary, to gain the new and different CSO qualifications to continue to accomplish the FSIS food safety mission.

Questions about the Workforce of the Future can be directed to: Workforce of the Future (on Outlook); or to one of the following members of the steering committee: John Esgar (in the Minneapolis HRFO) at 800-370-3747, Joanne Bolton, Sharin Sachs, or Yvonne Davis in Washington, DC, at 202-720-5362.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The 411 on 411

by Carolyn Scales
Automated Information Systems
Division
Telephone: 202-720-8124

Employees are encouraged to use the telephone directory for directory assistance calls when using a Federal Government telephone. The telephone company assesses a fee for all local and long distance directory assistance calls and operator assistance calls. They bill the Agency for these types of calls and all other calls for operator assistance. Directory assistance includes calls to 411, area code plus 555-1212, and 1-800-555-1212

calls. Costs vary from locality to locality. The following costs are associated with 411 calls in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area.

- Each call to 411 in the District costs 36 cents.
- Each call to 411 in Maryland costs 40 cents.
- Each call to 411 in Virginia costs 29 cents.
- Each call to National 411 costs 95 cents.

Costs to FSIS occur when the following two types of calls are placed in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area). These charges also vary depending on the locality.

- Interrupt Service - \$1.20 per call.
- Verify Busy - 75 cents per call.

Although the costs per call may seem minimal, the total cost can be very costly to the Agency. When these calls are made, they are reflected in the Agency's telephone bill. FSIS distributes telephone directories to a limited number of FSIS offices. We give copies of the directories to director's offices, administrative personnel, and the administrator's staff offices.

If you have any questions, please contact Microsupport at:

Telephone: 202-720-4016
Toll Free: 1-877-277-4783
Fax: 202-690-3738
E-mail (Outlook): MicroSupport

TEC-2001

TEC Today--YOU Can Help!

by Mary Wissman
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 301-504-4333

What's this? Yes, it's the name of a subgroup of the FSIS Training and Education Committee or TEC-2001 for short. The subgroup "TEC Today" is compiling a

comprehensive summary of FSIS educational programs available today. Here's where we could use your help!

Let us know of any training course or educational program (including technical assistance and/or information provisions) that FSIS provides or cooperates with other agencies to provide. Such course or program may be provided for any of the groups on the farm-to-table continuum (i.e., employees, supervisors, producers, industry, transporters, distributors, retailers, food handlers, consumers, other government employees, and medical/scientific/research communities). Subgroup members will be interviewing many individuals to gather information, but we would like to hear from YOU. If you have information on today's training and programs, please share it with us. Just e-mail the information to "TEC-2001@usda.gov" or contact Peggy Nunnery, Project Director on 202-720-8609.

Watch coming issues of *The Beacon* for updates and additional information on TEC-2001 activities.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE

EAP Counseling on Outlook: Help Is at Your Fingertips!

by Roslyn Robinson
Labor and Employee Relations
Division
Telephone: 202-720-5657

Information on the Agency's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and counseling advice is now available on the FSIS Outlook system. This self-help guide can be accessed from the Public Folders, and found in the *Personnel* Public Folder.

All users are encouraged to open the file. Personal problems are a part of life, and seeking assistance can be the first step toward

resolving issues. Aside from the information on dealing with personal, family, and job related concerns, the site also addresses, but is not limited to, strategies for handling:

- Commuter stress
- Effective supervision
- Legal problems
- AIDS concerns
- Anger management and grief
- Managing change

If you need more information on the EAP, please contact me at the above listed telephone number.

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

FSIS Complaints Management Program

by Arthur Simmons, Jr.
Civil Rights Division
Telephone: 202-205-0743

In July 1999, the Agency offered Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) to a number of disputants who had filed EEO complaints. More than 60% of the individuals elected to participate in the initiative. As a result of this initiative, success of the program in other agencies, and EEOC's requirement for Federal agencies to make ADR available to disputants, FSIS offers ADR to disputants at both the pre-complaint and formal complaint processes.

The FSIS ADR Program offers employees and applicants for employment an opportunity to resolve disputes at all stages of the complaint process. The disputing parties are encouraged to engage in ADR during the pre-complaint and formal complaint processes. The process is informal and a neutral third party known as a mediator facilitates resolution of the dispute. The mediator has no power to make a decision or force one on either

party. The mediator works with both parties to reach a voluntary agreement of their own. The mediator is selected from a list of highly trained neutrals from throughout USDA and other Federal agencies.

When ADR is selected, the traditional counseling is changed. The EEO counselor conducts the Initial Counseling session, identifies claims, and discusses the disputant's rights, including the option to elect traditional counseling or ADR. The disputant is informed that he or she may not be required to waive rights to an investigation, a hearing, or an appeal of the final decision to the EEOC as a condition of participating in ADR. The disputant is told that if the ADR process is not successful, they will receive a final interview within 90 days of the initial contact with the FSIS Civil Rights Division (CRD) and given the right to file a formal complaint.

A typical mediation session is normally scheduled for a day. However, it may take more or less time depending on the complexity of the issues. The process usually begins with a joint session. During the first meeting, the mediator explains the process and how it works and answers any questions. After each party presents his or her side of the story, the mediator may meet with each party separately (caucus) to discuss the issues in greater detail and to gain a better sense of how the parties want the issue resolved.

The mediation process may then continue with a series of separate meetings or the mediator may decide to continue meeting jointly with the parties. During these joint and private meetings, the mediator will explore with the parties various options for resolving the dispute. The mediator can act in any number of roles, i.e., communicator, translator, agent of reality, etc. The

goal of mediation is to reach a mutually agreeable resolution.

If a tentative agreement is reached, the mediator will draft a written settlement document incorporating all terms, which may include mutual general releases from all liability relating to the subject matter of the dispute. The draft settlement document will be circulated among the parties, amended as necessary, and formally executed. Where significant drawbacks exist and the parties cannot resolve their differences and no agreement is possible, the mediator notes the attempt and returns the case file to the Program Coordinator.

In considering whether ADR is right for you, consider the following:

- Will you be involved in continuing work relationships?
- Do you want it settled confidentially and informally?
- Do you want to have a voice in shaping the agreement?

The parties to ADR also need to know that the proceedings of the ADR are confidential. In fact, the entire process is confidential. The mediator will not willingly be a witness in a court of law or an administrative process. No written record will be made of the mediation process.

Secondly, mediation is quick and will hopefully result in a win-win situation for all parties. An EEO mediation settlement takes much less time to achieve than the more timely, sometimes bitter and costly process of litigation.

Finally, the disputant does not give up any right to pursue the matter formally. While mediation is designed to be an informal settlement process, it is entirely voluntary. The parties or the mediator can end the session at any time.

Frank Sander, Harvard Professor and Mentor of the ADR Initiative, considers mediation as a suitable alternative to resolve disputes. He made the following comment:

"It seems to me that up to now we have had far too single-minded a preoccupation on the adversary system as the paradigm dispute resolution process. While the adversary method may be ideally suited to the resolution of sharp conflict over factual issues, there are many other problems for which it is not so well suited. I also sense a perceptible public disenchantment with the increasing complexity and remoteness of the traditional dispute resolution process. Sometimes that process appears to be so cumbersome that it develops a *life of its own and loses sight of the underlying problems it was designed to resolve*. For the ultimate issue is not who hit whom, but rather how this degenerating relationship can be constructively restructured. For that type of dispute *between interdependent* individuals, a mediative process seems far more apt than a coercive process."

One FedNews writer may have best summarized the value of ADR when he said, "ADR may turn out to be the most important human resources management initiative of the early part of the 21st century."

Questions on ADR may be directed to the CRD, ATTN: Arthur Simmons, Jr., Program Coordinator, at 202-205-0743 or 202-205-0588 (fax).

HUMAN RESOURCES

Inplant Recruitment Initiative

The Office of Management (OM) and the Office of Field Operations (OFO) are partnering to implement a variety of new strategies to strengthen the overall inplant hiring program and address staffing shortages resulting from today's

tight labor market. The overall goal is to achieve an inplant staffing level of 7,610 by June, an overall increase of approximately 170 line positions nationwide. To keep pace with attrition, immediate action is underway to fill over 240 Inspector and Veterinary Medical officer positions. Also, 50 additional staff years have been allocated for other than permanent positions.

- Since October, 124 new inspectors and veterinarians have been hired. One hundred additional hires are anticipated over the next 60 days with efforts ongoing to reach targeted levels by June.
- Contact has been initiated with 135 veterinarian candidates to determine their availability for 66 current and projected vacancies.
- In order to identify other positions to be filled and to strengthen linkage between OM and OFO in planning projected needs, OM held a meeting in Minneapolis in December. The Deputy District Managers and Resource Management Specialists worked with the Human Resources Field Office (HRFO) specialists, OFO Resource Management and Planning Staff, Richard Bolding from the Budget Division and John Scogin from OM to develop individual Hiring Plans for their districts.
- The Agency recruitment program has been expanded to include: establishing formal recruitment programs for Food Inspectors; broadening recruitment activities for Veterinarians; developing an Agency-wide recruitment plan and specific recruitment plans for each district, and identifying locations where special recruitment activities are needed in conjunction with the

formal plans. A variety of special emphasis activities are also planned to include expanding campus recruitment to cover 1890 Land Grant schools, historically Black colleges and universities, and Hispanic Serving Institutions.

- Pay and hiring incentives will be used including use of temporary 120-day appointments to allow employees to come on board immediately until tests can be administered; and the use of recruitment bonuses and payment of travel to first post of duty.
- Beginning in January, Food Inspector tests schedules were distributed to all headquarters plants. All employees are encouraged to share this information with prospective candidates for employment.

Further updates will be published in *The Beacon* to keep Agency employees posted on the status of the Agency inplant hiring initiative. Questions regarding applying for Agency positions can be directed to HRFO at 1-800-370-3747.

December/January Retirements

Kathleen Avila, FI, Nampa, ID, OFO, 12/18/99, 5 Years
Sylvia S. Bagley, Stffng Speclst, Minneapolis, MN, OM, 12/31/99, 14 Years
Sara Beck, Tech Info Speclst, FSES, Washington, DC, 12/31/99, 23 Years
Milton Benson, Dep Dist Mgr, Atlanta, GA, OFO, 12/31/99, 28 Years
Chester Bentley, FI, Boyton Beach, FL, OFO, 12/31/99, 32 Years
John Boham, FI, Omaha, NE, OFO, 01/01/00, 31 Years
Darrell L. Bower, SVMO, Carthage, MO, OFO, 12/31/99, 7 Years
Wesley D. Boyer, Consmr Safety Inspr, Milton, PA, OFO, 12/31/99, 32 Years

Stanley C. Brooks, Consmr Safety Insp, Lima, OH, OFO, 01/01/00, 27 Years

Ralph P. Brown, Cir. Supvr (SVMO), Cincinnati, OH, OFO, 01/01/00, 41 Years

Luther E. Buchanan, Consmr Safety Insp, Columbus, GA, OFO, 01/01/00, 32 Years

Marion Cain, Consmr Safety Insp, Detroit, MI, OFO, 12/31/99, 25 Years

William D. Campbell, FI, Center Hill, FL, OFO, 12/31/99, 26 Years

Harold G. Capps, FI, Lexington, TN, OFO, 12/31/99, 26 Years

Velmer D. Chipps, Food Technlgst, Omaha, NE, OFO, 01/01/00, 46 Years

Frances W. Chung, FI, Gainesville, GA, OFO, 01/01/00, 16 Years

William F. Coates, VMO, Xenia, OH, OFO, 12/31/99, 30 Years

Peter Colletti, Jr., Consmr Safety Insp, Camden, NJ, OFO, 01/01/00, 27 Years

Billy J. Cooper, Consmr Safety Insp, Albuquerque, NM, OFO, 12/31/99, 28 Years

Marion L. Davis, FI, Broken Bow, OK, OFO, 12/18/99, 14 Years

James R. Dawson, Supvr Food Tech, Modesto, CA, OFO, 01/01/00, 31 Years

Gary D. Day, FI, Springfield, MO, OFO, 12/31/99, 30 Years

Jesus L. De La Cruz, FI, Ft. Morgan, CO, OFO, 12/31/99, 5 Years

Dominic A. Dellavolpe, Consmr Safety Insp, Stratford, CT, OFO, 01/01/00, 33 Years

Terrance J. Doyle, FI, Ft. Collins, CO, OFO, 01/01/00, 25 Years

Jimmie M. Durham, FI, Temperanceville, VA, OFO, 01/01/00, 31 Years

Mark P. Elliott, Cir Supvr (SVMO), Tacoma, WA, OFO, 01/01/00, 34 Years

Carrie Freeman, FI, Trussville, AL, OFO, 12/31/99, 8 Years

Robert M. Frieze, Consmr Safety Insp, Tacoma, WA, OFO, 12/31/99, 24 Years

Charles J. Gensheimer, Classfion & Wage Speclst, Washington, DC, OM, 01/01/00, 33 Years

William K. Graham, Cir Supvr (SFI), San Fernando, CA, OFO, 12/31/99, 23 Years

Bobby J. Grubbs, Consmr Safety Insp, Cincinnati, OH, OFO, 12/31/99, 30 Years

Thomas J. Haley, Jr., Health & Benefits Officer, Minneapolis, Mn, OM, 12/31/99, 32 Years

Glenn D. Hamann, FI, Sioux City, IA, OFO, 12/31/99, 32 Years

William J. Havlik, Asst Dep Admin, Washington, DC, OPHS, 12/31/99, 30 Years

Stanley C. Hinzman, FI, Storm Lake, IA, OFO, 01/01/00, 33 Years

Gaines B. Hobson, FI, Jacksonville, FL, OFO, 01/01/00, 33 Years

Charles R. Jordan, Consmr Safety Insp, Hazelhurst, MS, OFO, 12/31/99, 42 Years

Claude C. Justice, FI, Ooltewatt, TN, OFO, 12/31/99, 26 Years

Stanley Kay, Compliance Officer, Diamond Bar, CA, OFO, 01/01/00, 37 Years

Norman A. Kibiger, SVMO, Canton, OH, OFO, 12/18/99, 27 Years

Everett C. Lail, Jr., Food Technlgst, Washington, DC, OPPDE, 12/31/99, 33 Years

Alfred Liepold, Food Technlgst, Washington, DC, OPPDE, 12/31/99, 40 Years

Roberto Macias, Sr., Consmr Safety Insp, TX, OFO, 01/01/00, 34 Years

Carl D. Massey, Consmr Safety Insp, Mt Olive, NC, OFO, 01/01/00, 33 Years

Robert J. Massey, FI, Milford, DE, OFO, 12/18/99, 19 Years

Andrew McMillan, Consmr Safety Insp, Raeford, NC, OFO, 01/01/00, 27 Years

Anna M. Mendoza, Consmr Safety Insp, Hollywood, FL, OFO, 12/31/99, 31 Years

Karen J. Mitchell, Consmr Safety Insp, Lufkin, TX, OFO, 01/01/00, 17 Years

Persia L. Morgan, Consmr Safety Insp, New York, NY, OFO, 01/01/00, 42 Years

Morgan E. Nederhiser, SVMO, Willmar, MN, OFO, 12/31/99, 16 Years

Charles J. Olson, FI, Green Bay, WI, OFO, 01/01/00, 6 Years

Robert L. Osborn, FI, Lansing, MI, OFO, 01/01/00, 36 Years

Edison L. Payton, Cir Supvr (SFI), Chicago, IL, OFO, 12/31/99, 31 Years

Verdus A. Petsche, FI, Dubuque, IA, OFO, 01/01/00, 39 Years

Carlos J. Price, Consmr Safety Insp, Florence, KY, OFO, 12/31/99, 26 Years

John P. Puchko, Consmr Safety Insp, Pittsburgh, PA, OFO, 12/31/99, 36 Years

David L. Reichelt, Consmr Safety Insp, Mitchell, SD, OFO, 12/31/99, 31 Years

Nancy L. Renteria, Computer Specialist, Des Moines, IA, OM, 12/31/99, 27 Years

John D. Rodriguez, SFI-Imports Coord, Long Beach, CA, OFO, 01/01/00, 33 Years

John H. Schuler, SVMO, Cullman, AL, OFO, 12/31/99, 31 Years

Randall O. Shelton, Consmr Safety Insp, Johnson City, TN, OFO, 12/31/99, 28 Years

James B. Sinclair, FI, Philadelphia, PA, OFO, 01/01/00, 35 Years

Gilmer Smith, FI, Bristol, VA, OFO, 12/31/99, 32 Years

James H. Sparks, FI, Campbellsville, KY, OFO, 01/01/00, 29 Years

Martha G. Stamps, FI, Decatur, AR, OFO, 12/31/99, 18 Years

Galen H. Swank, Compliance Officer, OFO, 01/01/00, 21 Years

Robert F. Szczesny, Circ Spvr (Supvr Food Tech), Elk Grove Village, IL, OFO, 01/01/00, 35 Years

George Texeira, FI, Livingston, CA, OFO, 12/31/99, 5 Years

Raymond J. Torres, Consmr Safety Insp, Little Rock, AR, OFO, 12/31/99, 34 Years

Abraham Trinidad, SVMO, Colorado Springs, CO, OFO, 12/31/99, 30 Years

Donald E. Watkins, Consmr Safety Insp, Taylorstown, PA, OFO, 01/01/00, 31 Years

Virginia C. Watts, FI, Springdale, AR, OFO, 12/31/99, 15 Years

Galen A. Wilbur, FI, Springfield, MO, OFO, 12/31/99, 37 Years
James C. Williams, FI, Greenville, SC, OFO, 01/01/00, 14 Years
Harold E. Young, Jr., Consmr Safety Insp, Buffalo, NY, OFO, 12/31/99, 26 Years

Deaths-In-Service

Michael E. Wright, Sr., FI, Edinburg, VA, OFO, 1/5/00
James W. Blank, Dist Mgr, Madison, WI, OFO, 1/08/00

Leave Transfer Recipients

1. Jackie Copeland
OFO, DC; Illness
2. Annie Stewart
POB, MN; Serious Illness
3. Linda Cole
OPPDE, DC; Serious Illness
4. Sonya West
OPPDE, DC; Maternity
5. Joyce Schultz
POB, MN; Serious Illness
6. Stephanie Showell
OFO, DE; Family Illness
7. Michael Schwochert
OFO, CO; Surgery
8. Willia Stepney
OM, DC; Maternity
9. Linda Carey
EMS, DC; Surgery
10. Nancy Clyburn
OPHS, DC; Surgery
11. George Olson
OFO, MN; Family Illness
12. Kellie Upshaw
EMS, DC; Maternity
13. Traci Edmond
EMS, DC; Maternity
14. Mary Sutton
OPHS, GA; Complications w/pregnancy
15. Marilyn Weber
FPC, IA; Illness
16. Robert Martz
OFO, IA; Serious Illness
17. Lorraine Kauffman
OM, DC; Maternity
18. Betty Morgan
OFO, AR; Family Illness
19. Carolyn Woolfolk
OFO, DC; Surgery
20. OFO-99-0027

- OFO, NC, Surgery
21. Theresa Spoering
OFO, MN; Surgery
22. OFO-99-0034
OFO, SD; Family Illness
23. Karen Wratchford
OFO, KY; Surgery
24. Maureen Murphy
OFO, OK; Surgery
25. Tammy Love
OFO, AR; Surgery
26. Steve Engels
OFO, IA; Serious Illness
27. Sue Engels
OFO, IA; Family Illness
28. Michael Craig
OFO, NE; Family Illness
29. Nicole Wareham
OFO, IN; Maternity
30. Michelle Long
OM, DC; Surgery
31. Glenda Snyders
OFO, KS; Surgery
32. Angela Cuello
OFO, TX; Serious Illness
33. Mona Eder
OFO, IL; Maternity
34. Aurbrey Tribble
OFO, FL; Serious Illness
35. Jacqueline Bonner
OFO, AL; Surgery
36. Denise Bassell
FPC, IA; Illness
37. John French
OFO, GA; Family Illness
38. Victor Varnadoe
OFO, OH; Family Illness
39. OFO-99-0049
OFO, MA; Surgery
40. Tommie Olson
OFO, NE; Surgery
41. Clement Grangier
OFO, MD; Serious Illness
42. OFO-99-0047
OFO, IA; Surgery
43. Mark Spear
OFO, AL; Surgery
44. Dunita Harris
OFO, TX; Maternity
45. James Layman
OFO, OH; Serious Illness

* While not consenting to the publication of their names, certain LTP recipients are assigned a number that they may provide to their co-workers if they choose so

that donated leave may be transferred to their account. Any questions on the LTP should be referred to the Human Resources Field Office on 1-800-370-3747 for field employees and to the Classification and Compensation Branch for HQ employees on 202-720-6287.

VDIP

Preventing Conflict

by Milo Christianson

Telephone: 612-370-2000

Kathy Welsh

Telephone: 202-720-5657

Labor and Employee Relations Division

Conflict is an inescapable fact of life. Often it occurs simply because of our differences – different races, religions, cultures, ethnic groups, ages, expectations, interests, goals, values, principles, perceptions, group identifications, and so on. Sometimes it occurs when we perceive that our needs are not being met. We also have feelings and emotions that can lead or contribute to conflict.

Our work can also be a source of conflict. Competition for resources, fuzzy responsibility levels, personal goals versus organizational goals, communication barriers, increased interaction and interdependency, change, and management style can all lead to conflict. In regard to management style, for example, research has shown that organizations that have an authoritarian or non-participative style generally have higher levels of conflict than organizations that have a more participative style. In non-participative organizations, managers generally define the problems, decide on the solutions, and sell their decisions to (or force them upon) subordinate employees. While such a management style is necessary in some situations, it will generally lead to increasing levels of

conflict if it becomes the dominant style of the organization.

We cannot eliminate conflict. There will always be differences, unmet needs, feelings, emotions, and organizational barriers. Even if we could somehow eliminate conflict, we probably would not want to do so because it is often through conflict situations that new ideas are born and problems are identified. All we can hope to do is manage conflict – to make certain that while it may be a fact of life, it does not become a way of life.

So what can we do to manage conflict? What can we do to keep it from becoming a way of life in our organization? In recent articles in *The Beacon*, we have discussed a couple of options. Conflict can, first of all, be managed through the intervention of a third party. In FSIS, we created the Voluntary Dispute Intervention Program (VDIP) to help employees resolve conflict with the assistance of a third party intervenor or mediator. Conflicts can also be resolved without the intervention of a third party. In the December issue of *The Beacon*, we discussed the importance of active listening to achieving this goal. In the January issue, we focused on a process that parties can use to resolve conflicts without the aid of a third party.

There is one more strategy for dealing with conflict, and that is to take action to try to prevent it. This may seem like the most difficult strategy, since it involves the greatest initial investment of time. Over time, however, this investment can pay significant dividends.

Probably the most significant thing we can do to prevent conflict is to *create opportunities for communication and participation*. As noted above, organizations that do not create such opportunities generally have higher levels of conflict than those that are

intentional about doing so. These are a few of the ways that such opportunities can be created and encouraged:

- *If you are a supervisor*, take every opportunity to encourage participation and communication with and among your employees. Let your employees know that you are interested in their problems and concerns, and that you are willing to listen to them. Then make certain that you follow through with your promise to listen. Keep employees informed. Make certain that your instructions are clear and that employees feel free to discuss instructions that they do not understand. Create formal opportunities for group communication. These opportunities can include everything from suggestion boxes to formal meetings. Whenever possible, encourage participation both prior to, and during, a meeting. Give employees an opportunity to suggest topics for the meeting, and make certain that during the meeting, everyone is given an opportunity to speak.
- *If you are an employee*, make the most of your opportunities to discuss problems, concerns and other issues with your supervisor. No one can read minds. We all need to talk if we want to be heard and understood. Resolving conflict can take time. Addressing an issue may take more than one conversation.

Creating opportunities for communication and participation will help foster an organization that is conducive to effective conflict management. As noted, however, not every conflict can be prevented, nor is it always possible for parties to resolve their own existing conflicts without the aid of a third party. If you have a conflict that you

have been unable to prevent or resolve through normal interpersonal communication, please consider calling the Voluntary Dispute Intervention Program (VDIP). The VDIP can be reached by calling 1-800-860-VDIP (8347) or 612-370-2010, ext. 2539 in Minneapolis or 202-205-0066 in Washington.

SUPPLIES

Plastic Tanker Seals

by Pete Bridgeman

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We are aware that there have been problems with the plastic tanker seals (FSIS-EPI-01). We are currently working with the egg products program to develop a seal that will better fit the tanker lids while mitigating any hazard from the previous metal seals. We are currently working on a suggestion to replace the plastic seal with a cable one that would eliminate the cut hazards of metal seals while providing an adequate and simple-to-use seal. We hope to have a replacement for the plastic seals ready to go within the next couple of months. We plan to obtain samples and test them at actual egg products establishments to ensure that they will work and be the best item for the job. We will keep you posted on developments on this project.

VEHICLES

Use of Government Vehicles Outside Defined Areas

by Brian McNiff

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All government vehicles used in support of FSIS programs are leased from the General Services Administration (GSA) Interagency Fleet Management System (IFMS).

The GSA IFMS is divided into ten regions throughout the United States, which also includes Puerto Rico. All Agency employees assigned a government vehicle for the performance of their duties are not authorized to operate the vehicle outside the geographical region served by the issuing Fleet Management Center. The Fleet Manager of the issuing Fleet Management Center must approve any exceptions to this regulation. The policy of FSIS is to comply with all regulations cited in 41 CFR 101, Subchapter G – Aviation, Transportation, and Motor Vehicles.

This office has received several inquiries about using the government vehicle for travel to attend training in College Station, TX. In almost all cases this will not be approved because it would involve driving the vehicle outside the region that the vehicle is assigned. Travel within the issuing Fleet Management Region is authorized providing it is for official government business. All personnel must comply with the travel regulations and do a cost comparison when using a government vehicle for travel in lieu of the contract carrier.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

Lockout/Tagout – Periodic Inspection and Training

by Harry E. Springfield, Jr.
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As the saying goes - "It's time". In accordance with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) Lockout/Tagout Standard and FSIS Directive 4791.11, Lockout/Tagout Safety Procedures, periodic inspections of the energy control procedures are to be conducted at least annually to ensure that the procedures and the requirements of the standard are

being followed. For Federally inspected plants, the inspection is to be completed during the *first quarter of the calendar year*. The inspection should be performed by the circuit supervisor or designee other than the one(s) performing the procedure at the workplace.

During the periodic inspection, the circuit supervisor or designee should also review the training of inspection personnel on the lockout/tagout procedures. Inspection personnel that cannot demonstrate competency in performing the procedure should be retrained. In addition, retraining must be provided whenever there are changes in an employee's assignment, changes in machines, equipment, and processes, or changes in the energy control procedures. The circuit supervisor must submit certification to the District Office *each January* that inspection personnel are proficient in performing lockout/tagout procedures and that any required retraining has been completed. See the Lockout/Tagout directive for information on documenting and certifying periodic inspections and training.

If you have any questions concerning lockout/tagout, please contact the field safety and health specialist assigned responsibility for your District.

TRAVEL

Increase in the Mileage Rate

by Barbara McNiff
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GSA increased the mileage rate from 31 cents/mile to 32.5 cents/mile for Privately Owned Vehicles (POV), effective January 14, 2000. FSIS Notice 2-00 announcing this change has been issued and is being distributed to all employees. While GSA is looking

at the rates for privately-owned motorcycles and privately-owned automobiles, there has been no change in the mileage rates for these vehicles, nor has there been any change in the rate for high mileage drivers.

New Laundry Policy

FSIS Directive 3800.1, Revision 2, Amendment 10, containing the new per diem rates has been issued. Please note the standard CONUS rate has been increased from \$80 to \$85 (\$55 for lodging and \$30 for meals and incidental expenses).

In addition to the new per diem rates, this Directive also contains the Agency's newly implemented laundry policy. Laundry can now be claimed as a separate miscellaneous expense when the following conditions are met:

- The traveler must incur five or more consecutive night's lodging on official travel.
- The expenses must be incurred at a TDY site.
- The expenses may not be incurred on the first or last day of travel
- The expenses must be appropriate
- Reimbursement is limited to actual expenses not to exceed \$10 for each 5 night's lodging or subsequent portion of 5 night's lodging.

Mileage Reimbursement

We received this question from Samuel Robins, a field employee who suggested we might want to provide the response in *The Beacon*.

Q. Recently my supervisor instructed me to list the establishments that I visit on my patrol assignment in the order that I visit them each day in the remarks section of my travel voucher. It seems like I read a publication a

couple of years ago that stated "establishments should not be listed, but rather cities should be listed that the establishments are in." Also I list the establishments visited in the order I drive to them on my T&A. Isn't this redundancy? One more thing. The amount of combinations or permutations that I can visit the establishments is quite large so the remarks section on the travel voucher should be bigger. My suggestion is to just list all of the cities that are in a patrol assignment.

A. Employees who claim daily mileage reimbursement on their travel vouchers should list each establishment which they visit and not the cities in which the establishment is located. There are several reasons for this.

First, employees who have patrol assignments in large cities such as New York City or Los Angeles, may have several plants in that city as part of their patrol. As Mike Mayer, Resource Management Specialist, Albany District, points out, if employees only list the city, the approving official has no way of verifying the order in which the plants were visited and thus would not be able to ascertain that program integrity was being maintained. He also pointed out that occasionally some plants may require more than one visit a day. Listing all the establishments and the order in which they were visited, particularly in large cities where an employee may have several plants, again, allows the approving official to more accurately judge the mileage claims.

The Albany District solved the "too little space on the travel voucher" problem by having the employees code each one of their permutations alphabetically, e.g. CODE A indicates the plants were visited in the following order: Est. 1234, Est. 2345, Est. 3456, Est. 5643, CODE B indicates the plants were visited in

this order: Est. 2345, Est. 1234, Est., 5643, Est. 3456 and so on. Employees can list each alpha code with a description of the order in which the plants were visited for each code in the Remarks section of the voucher. In the columns for "Parking, tolls, etc." or in the column for "Unaccompanied Baggage" employees can list then list the correct alpha code for each day.

Transaction Fees for Airline Tickets

Although we advised you in the January issue of *The Beacon* that transaction fees for airline tickets could be claimed as a miscellaneous expense, many of the Travel Management Centers (TMC), had not yet begun charging this fee, and thus, our article failed to register with many employees. Now that more and more TMC's are charging transaction fees, we would like to remind you to review your itinerary to see if you have been assessed such a fee, and if so, to claim it on your travel voucher.

Mandatory Use of the Government-Issued Travel Charge Card

by Sue Ayers
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By order of the Travel and Transportation Reform Act, the General Services Administration (GSA) has determined that *mandatory use of the travel charge card will become effective on March 1, 2000*. However, GSA has provided the Department with the authority for some exceptions to (a) the mandatory use and (b) the mandatory issuance of the card.

Exceptions to Mandatory Issuance of the Card:

1. New employees who may be required to perform temporary duty travel enroute to their first post of duty.

2. Employees who have had their cards canceled by the issuing bank.
3. Intermittent/seasonal employees and those not expected to travel more than twice a year.
4. Employees with issues concerning credit; e.g., those with credit problems or issues, whether past or present.

Expenses Exempt from Mandatory Use of the Card:

Out-of-pocket expenses, including those incurred from (a) laundry/dry cleaning, (b) parking, (c) taxicabs, (d) tips, (e) local transportation systems, (f) telephone calls, and (g) items covered by the M&IE allowances. Payment for these expenses could be by funds received from a travel advance or from an ATM cash advance.

However, employees are encouraged to charge as many expenses as possible to the charge card in order to maximize the rebates paid to the Government by the charge card company.

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

Security Procedures

by Pete Bridgeman
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We have recently issued a revision to FSIS Directive 2532.1. This revision (Revision 2, 12/2/99) updates the organizational references in the directive and includes provisions for reporting offenses in FSIS-occupied space (excluding plants), and provides a reference sheet for handling emergencies. We have enclosed a copy of this reference sheet as Attachment 1 to this issue of *The Beacon*. This reference sheet is only for use in offices other than inspected plants, such as District Offices, Compliance Offices,

Headquarters Offices, the Technical Service Center, Financial Processing Center, etc.

Procedures to follow for offices in USDA inspected plants can be found in FSIS Directive 4735.4.

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The current and past editions of *The Beacon* are available electronically on the FSIS OpenDesk and Exchange mail systems as well as on the FSIS Website at: www.fsis.usda.gov/om/adserv.htm

ATTACHMENT 1

HANDY REFERENCE SHEET

All employees should follow these procedures. Make copies of this sheet if necessary so everyone will have their own.

CHECKLIST FOR TELEPHONE BOMB THREAT

- Identify the exact time & date of call: _____
- Identify the exact words of caller: (Ask them to repeat the message, if necessary, and write as much as possible) _____

- Keep calm. Keep talking.
- Don't hang up.
- Signal coworker to get on an extension and notify the Federal Protective Service (FPS), contract guards, or the local police.
- Ask the following questions:
 - "When and where is the bomb going to explode?" _____
 - "What does the bomb look like?" _____
 - "What type of bomb is it?" _____
 - "What will cause it to detonate?" _____
 - "Why are you doing this?" _____
 - "Where are you calling from?" _____
- Try to get the caller's full name: _____
- Try to get the caller's exact location and phone number: _____
- Repeat questions, if necessary.
- Listen carefully to the voice and note whether it's a man or a woman and the pitch, and accent of the voice. Circle the following:

Calm	Slow	Nasal	Angry	Broken
Stutter	Disguised	Lisp	Sincere	Rapid
Giggler	Deep	Crying	Squeaky	Excited
Stressed	Accent	Loud	Slurred	Normal
- If the voice is familiar, who did it sound like? _____
- Are there any background noises? (Examples: cars, train) _____

- Is there any other pertinent information? _____

- Enter the name of the person receiving the call: _____
- Enter the telephone number at which call was received: _____
- Provide the time and date you notified FPS and your immediate supervisor: _____

(NOTE: This sheet is derived from the Federal Protective Service website.)

Emergency Phone Numbers

Carefully cut out the "Emergency Phone Numbers" card along the dotted lines. Write in all the emergency numbers for your building. Tape this card on your desk, or close to your phone for handy reference. (Make copies of this section if necessary.)

Emergency Phone Numbers

FPS _____
Building Security _____
Police/Sheriff _____
Fire Department _____
Ambulance _____
Health Unit _____

Coping With Threats and Violence

The attached desk card summarizes the actions you should (or should not) take. Print out and detach the card, tear or cut along the dotted lines. Tape this card on your desk for handy reference. Review the card often so that if you are confronted by an angry, hostile, or threatening customer or coworker, you know what you should do. All employees should follow these procedures. Make copies of this card so that everyone has their own card.

Coping with Threats and Violence**If a person is:***** Angry or hostile:**

- Stay calm. Listen attentively.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Be courteous. Be patient.
- Keep the situation in your control.

*** Shouting, searing, and threatening:**

- Signal a coworker, or supervisor, that you need help. (Use a duress alarm system or prearranged code words.)
- Do not make any calls yourself.
- Have someone call the FPS, contract guard, or local police.

*** Threatening you with a gun, knife, or other weapon:**

- Stay calm. Quietly signal for help. (Use duress alarm or code words.)
- Maintain eye contact.
- Stall for time.
- Keep talking - but follow instructions from the person who has the weapon.
- Don't risk harm to yourself or others.
- Never try to grab a weapon.

Watch for a possible chance to escape to a safe area.

ATTACHMENT 2

C, F, and G Fund Monthly Returns
January 10, 1999

Months	C Fund	S&P 500 Stock Index	F Fund	Lehman Brothers U.S. Aggregate Bond Index	G Fund
1994 (Jan. - Dec.)	1.33%	1.32%	(2.96%)	(2.92%)	7.22%
1995 (Jan. - Dec.)	37.41%	37.58%	18.31%	18.47%	7.03%
1996 (Jan. - Dec.)	22.85%	22.96%	3.66%	3.63%	6.76%
1997 (Jan. - Dec.)	33.17%	33.36%	9.60%	9.65%	6.77%
1998 (Jan. - Dec.)	28.44%	28.58%	8.70%	8.69%	5.74%
1999					
January	4.19	4.18	.71	.71	.42
February	(3.09)	(3.11)	(1.74)	(1.75)	.38
March	3.99	4.00	.54	.55	.47
April	3.86	3.87	.29	.32	.46
May	(2.36)	(2.36)	(0.89)	(0.88)	.47
June	5.54	5.55	(0.33)	(0.32)	.49
July	(3.14)	(3.12)	(0.43)	(0.42)	.52
August	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.05)	(0.05)	.53
September	(2.78)	(2.74)	1.15	1.16	.51
October	6.34	6.33	.38	.37	.53
November	2.00	2.03	(0.01)	(0.01)	.51
December	5.90	5.89	(0.45)	(0.48)	.54
Last 12 Months *	20.95	21.04	(0.85)	(0.82)	5.99
Percentages in () are negative.					

* Through 1990 the F Fund was invested in the Barclays Bond Index Fund.

The C Fund is invested in the Barclays Equity Index Fund which tracks the S&P 500 stock index. The F Fund is invested in the Barclays U.S. Debt Index Fund which tracks the Lehman Brothers U.S. Aggregate bond index. The G Fund is invested in special issues of U.S. Treasury securities.

The monthly C, F, and G Fund returns represent net earnings for the month, after deduction of accrued administrative expenses. The C and F Fund returns also reflect the deduction of trading costs and accrued investment management fees.

The C, F, and G Fund monthly returns are dollar-weighted: they reflect net earnings on the changing balances invested during the month.

**** The C, F, and G Fund returns for the last twelve months assume, except for the crediting of earnings, unchanging balances (time-weighting) from month to month and assume earnings are compounded on a monthly basis.**

The C and F Fund returns vary from the index returns because of C and F Fund expenses, changing balances in the C and F Funds, and differences in returns between the Barclays funds and the underlying indexes. The index returns are time-weighted: they assume constant dollar balances invested during each month and throughout the period.

Future performance of the three funds will vary and may be significantly different from the returns shown above. See the "Summary of the Thrift Savings Plan" for detailed information about the funds and their investment risks.